

*The Folly of Complaints in a Corrupt Nation:
The Methods proper to remove them, and to
procure Prosperity and Happiness.*

A
SERMON
PREACH'D before the
UNIVERSITY
OF
OXFORD,

At St Mary's on Sunday in the Afternoon,
Novemb. 5. 1721.

By ROB. PEARSE, M. A. Vice-Principal of St *Edmund* Hall, Rector of *Scotter* in *Lincoln-shire*,
and Chaplain to the Right Honourable the Lord
Lechmere.

*Return thou backsliding Israel, saith the Lord, and I will
not cause mine anger to fall upon you: acknowledge thine
Iniquity that thou hast transgress'd, and scatter'd thy
ways. Jer. III. 12.*

Οἱ πολλοὶ ἐκ τῆς κρατέντων ἀβουλίας γίνεσθαι λέγουσιν, ἀλλ' ἡ ἡμῶν
ἁμαρτία, ἐκείνη τὰ ἄνω χεῖρα πεποίηκεν, ἐκείνη πάντα τὰ
δεινὰ εἰσήγαγεν· ἐκ ἄλλοθεν ἡμῖν ὁ τῶν ἀνιερῶν ἐσμός ὑπερ-
εχύθη· τὸ τραῦμα μὲν ἡ ἁμαρτία, τὸ φάρμακον ἡ μετάνοια.
Chrysof. de Conf. & Pœnit.

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T O
THE RIGHT HONOURABLE
The LORD
LECHMERE,
BARON *EVESHAM*.

My Lord,

 *N attentive Auditory, the doing a World of Good, and the Request of Friends, are Reasons so flat, common, and every day given for the publishing Occasional Discourses, that I think it improper to offer them to a Person of Your Lordship's Judgment. My Design is to pay Respect to the greatest Man of his Profession, and of the Age, and to acknowledge my Zeal for Your Lordship's Name to the World.*

That Worthy Prelate, who without any application, has lately conferr'd a Favour on me; and my Great Friend the Attorney of the Dutchy for whom I'd even dare to dye; will both with pleasure behold me thus venturing the publick Censure, and making the Choice rather to be wanting in

Prudence to my self, by a publication of this Discourse, than in Gratitude and Respect to One, whose Excellencies, Fame, and noble Qualifications, can receive no Addition. This is confessed even by Your Lordship's Enemies, (for there never was from the Creation, a Person of Your Genius and Capacity without such) That whenever there was any dark, intricate Business, which required Sagacity and Labour to clear it up, Your Abilities were immediately thought on, to distinguish Just and Unjust, and to set all right.

May Others have the empty Applause of a Scheme, of a Project, of the Suppression of little Villanies in order to support the Grand Cheat, and of being the Authors of Confusion, Ruin, and Complaints. May it ever be Your Glory and Praise, as it has been Your constant Practice, That by a steady, unshaken Zeal and Loyalty, by a thorough Knowledge of our Constitution and Laws, by solid Arguments, and an irresistible Eloquence, You have promoted the Safety, Honour, and Wellfare of your King and Country. I am, with all possible submission,

My Lord,

Your Lordship's most humble,

and obedient Servant,

and Chaplain,

ROBERT PEARSE.



L A M. III. 39. 40.

*Wherefore doth a living man complain, a man for
the punishment of his sins?*

*Let us search and try our ways, and turn again
unto the Lord.*

Complaints ever ruin credit, and instead of remedy and consolation give pleasure to others, and procure contempt. Though a worldly wise man digests alike favours and disgrace 'till a convenient time; yet it seems natural for such as are under any affliction, to ease themselves by complaints; and to endeavour after some comfort, by giving vent, by breathing out the sorrows of a wounded Spirit. The pathological exclamations of the best and wisest of men, as *David* and *Job*, when the arrows of the Almighty stuck fast in them, stand on record. To deny this satisfaction, would be to refine upon Stoicism, make nature insensible of the general laws and order 'tis tyed to, 'twould be to dispute the goodness of pleasure, to renounce and contradict that for which all

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the hazards and difficulties of life are undergone, and discover a temper harder than the marble of mount *Sinai*. The Prophet could not look on the miseries of his country, the torrent of corruptions and debaucheries, the false prophets, priests, princes, and people encouraging these impieties; how upon the death of *Josiah* to the captivity the ways of *Sion* mourned, her adversaries were chief, and all her beauty departed: the Prophet could not behold how that City which was the glory of all cities, was under the frowns of heaven, was led captive, was become a hissing, a by-word, a reproach among the Heathen: the Prophet could not behold how that Nation which was so wealthy, so populous, and under the peculiar Providence of heaven, was become solitary, bankrupt, forsaken, without the greatest pity and wonder; How is she become a widow, she that was great among the nations, a Princess among the provinces, how is she become tributary!

These were just complaints considering the circumstances of the then people of God. But will lamentations, and mourning, and woe remove misfortunes? will womanish cries, and childish complaints fright calamity and distress, and place them at a distance from the afflicted? There are other manly, there are rational, there are religious methods to be persu'd, and means proper to be made use of, to which as to our
greatest

greatest duty as well as interest the Prophet directs. Mankind should consider punishments as the effect and consequence of Sin, what might have been avoided, and not only as an evil: they should be view'd and consider'd in a different, a much better, a more advantagious light, as divine chastisements, as corrections descending from above from the Father of lights, from the healing hand of the Almighty; in order to awake men into a sense of their condition, to lead to repentance and newness of life, to make them turn their feet to his testimonies, and delay not the time to keep his commandments. In short, by these irresistible ways and instruments, the Almighty, who never afflicts willingly or grieves the children of men, is pleased to remind the wicked to forsake his way, and the unrighteous man his thoughts, and to turn to the Lord who will have mercy upon him, and to our God who will abundantly pardon. *Wherefore then doth a living man complain, a man for the punishment of his Sins? Let him search and try his ways and turn again unto the Lord.*

Many and very different Explications are given by some, of the former part of these words. Our Translation has added the word *punishment* which the Original has not, nor yet any of the ancient Versions: על־הַפְּשָׁעִים *weel tñs amartias*, the Septuagint hath it: *Quid tædio se conficit homo vivens super peccato*

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suo, peccatis insists? scrutetur dicta, facta, cogitata, (says a learned Critick :) Why does a living man, one who has soul and life, and opportunity, and means to throw off the burden of his sin, to extricate himself from folly, misfortunes and trouble, why does he not act like a man, and stir, and move, and imploy the Reason, Powers, and Faculties given him, to set all right and make himself easy? * why does he enlarge the scenes of misery by a fever of imagination and fancy, and not forsaking the things behind, press forward towards the prize of Happiness and Eternity set before him, and with a just sense of the majesty of God, the dignity of his own nature, the necessity of his duty, turn again unto the Lord? According to this Explication in my following discourse I shall show,

First, That a man has no foundation, no reason to complain of sin or punishment, Why doth a living man complain? a man for his sins?

Secondly, I shall inforce the advice of the Prophet, as more acceptable to God, more becoming man; which is to break off from sin by a reformation and amendment, Let us search and try our ways, and turn again unto the Lord.

First, A man has no foundation or reason to complain, in any acceptance of the

* Vide *Groz.* aliosque in locum Criticos.

words, of sin or punishment. He should not complain, because he's a man: he should not complain, because he's a living man: he should not complain, because 'tis the punishment of his sin.

Nothing is more unbecoming than excessive complaints, and laying out more cost in grief than a misfortune is worth, without a just striving for freedom from the pain, affliction, and anguish. Nothing sets more odly on human nature, which is ever grasping at perfection, and endeavouring to give it self all the satisfactions within thought and power. There's no end proposed, no delights of sense or understanding in view, and the thing is absurd, foolish, and unreasonable. It discovers the greatest absence of thought, ever implies despair, and weakness, and want of ballast, as if the evil was past all cure and remedy, that nature must sink under it, and that the Supreme Being was unmindful of our condition, had forgotten to be gracious, and would forever shut up his loving kindness in displeasure. Whereas there's no state of life, no trying circumstances so gloomy, no infirmities, pain, or torture so great, not even in the last shocking scene, when death sets it terrors in array, and we are passing from nature to Eternity; but the spirit of a man will sustain him, and rise superior to them; and if he's not dead in sin, and the person has not sold himself to work wicked-

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wickedness, he may expect the kind assistance of the first Cause, and of holy guardian Spirits.

This behaviour one of the most strict and wise Sects of Philosophers * thought to be of the number of those things which were in our own power; and Christianity has fulfill'd the precept, by carrying it back to the first motions, and spring of our actions; and pronouncing such a weakness and indisposition of mind to be criminal. Let patience have her perfect work, and then the person is intire and wanting nothing. If the evil is from above, submission becomes a duty; if from men, only spirit and courage are requisite, and we should cease to resent from one whose breath is in his nostrils, for wherein is he to be accounted of?† Besides no affliction cometh forth of the dust: 'tis as natural to man, as the sparks to fly upward: a certain constant inheritance transmitted from parents to children; 'tis therefore the common lot of mankind, and would show too great a concern and excessive self love to imagine our condition more miserable, or that we deserve better than our fellow creatures. Thus the folly of man perverteth his way, he thinks himself often innocent, and that he suffers with the guilty; that he has deserts, but is unfortunate; he grows by degrees in love with melancholy,

* *Apollonius Stoicus hoc Antoninum docuit, ut agnoscit lib. i. ως; Eavr.* † *Quantilli ille reputatur. Grot.*

and at last finds a secret complacency and satisfaction in what ought to be his shame.

Should we suppose only the enjoyment of life, that's so great a blessing and bestow'd for such noble purposes as ought to cut off all complaint, passion, and discontent. 'Tis what is a kin to, what proceeded from the breath of the Almighty, what's more valuable than all the other parts of the Creation, and what should be drawn out in the performance of our duty, and the service of our God. Grant but life, and ease or indigence depend upon opinion; and wealth and honour and glory, those images which the world sets up, have no more pleasure than a person is pleas'd to give them. What's external may indeed offer matter, but 'tis the understanding and mind which gives the turn and form, and makes an happy or unhappy condition. If a concurrence of every thing good is requisite to happiness, there's no such thing as happiness in this world: nature and reason declare for the contrary: *Et nunquam naturam mos vinceret,** (says the Roman Orator) *sed nos umbris, deliciis, otio, languore, desidia, animum infecimus; opinionibus, maloque more delinitum molivimus.* Grant but life, and there's room for faith, and hope, and application to a Being of infinite mercy, for reflection on time past, and self condemnation for sin and folly. What the Apostle declares of Temptations, is true

* Tusc. Quæst.

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of all the various accidents and seeming chances of life, God will not suffer any to be tempted above what they are able, but will with the temptation also make a way to escape.

But lastly when the punishment is inflicted too for iniquity, transgression, and sin, what room then remains for murmuring, disquiet, and complaint? The Apostle in this case will not allow a patient submission any praise or commendation; for if ye be afflicted for your faults and take it patiently, what thank have ye? 'Tis only being dealt with as malefactors, only being dealt with according to your deserts, only receiving the due reward of your deeds. Though all moral evil is from our selves, and the fruit of our own actions, yet the evil of punishment, (and *that's* what most Expositors understand by these words of the Prophet; *sin*, for the punishment of *sin*) is a voluntary act of the Almighty; who cannot behold the least iniquity without indignation, who will not permit any violation of his law to go unpunish'd. The first of these commonly draws punishment after it as a necessary and natural effect; especially such sins as are of so deep a dye, so malignant a nature, wherein one single act is equivalent to an habit. And the latter are commonly inflicted by Heaven in such a visible manner, as that a stander by as well as the sufferer perceives the near relation they bear to

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to each other: and the same arrow of the Almighty at once wounds for transgression and points out the sin. The first of these, moral evil, has ever man for it's cause and origin, and is never owing to any positive act of the Almighty, but by his permission only, privatively, by withdrawing his divine Grace and assistance. He continues wise and pure, but suffers the Hypocrite and Atheous priest to tread his sacred courts, and minister about his Altar, handling holy things, praying and vowing. And when unnurtur'd souls have err'd so far, as that the light of nature is quench'd, and they are fetter'd with the bonds of night, they are too exiled from the eternal Providence, and the spirit of the Lord, wearied with their iniquities withdraws his presence from among them as from *Saul*, and they receive that recompence of their error that is meet. Nor does that argument urg'd by some from *Pelagius*, That that which is a sin, and carries it's own punishment along with it, (and all punishments are just and from God) at all prove that unrighteousness is in him, and he the author of sin: for tho' the most vicious person in transgressing the law, lives, moves, and has his being in God, yet the determination and choice is his own: he gives *himself* up to sin: he departs *voluntarily* from the living God: he is drawn away by the deceitfulness of sin and his own lusts and passions: there's no variableness or shadow of turning with

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the Almighty, he cannot be tempted with evil, neither tempteth he any man.

An infinitely wise Being governs, and tho' there is such a prevalency of moral Evil in the world, yet things are not tyed down to a fatal necessity: nor does the Prescience of God overrule the powers and faculties of free Agents: all the Evil springs from the abuse of powers and inclinations which are in themselves indifferent. The Objections which Deists and the Enemies of Religion have always urged, from the deluge of wickedness which covers the earth, have been owing to a want of reflection, That as creation and a communication of being was the effect of the divine Pleasure, so such a particular perfection, and order, and understanding, and faculties, and liberty in the scale of Existence and Being, were assign'd to man. He has taken of the tree of knowledge, can discern good and evil, perform what's right, may take of the tree of life if he pleases, be pure as Grace can make him, and perfect as his Father which is in heaven is perfect. 'Tis sufficient to show that the ways of God are equal if he deals with Beings agreeable to their capacities and nature: and that from the creation, and by the laws then establish'd to the consummation of all things, he has so ordain'd, that innocence and reward should meet together, and the practice of Vertue necessarily carry happiness along with it. And whoever finds fault with the composition

sition of the lesser world intellectual or moral, and the frame of Man, equally arraigns infinite Wisdom, is alike assuming & impious, as he who affirmed, That had he been present when the foundations of the Earth were laid, and the *Morning Stars* (or Angels) sang together, he would have done what these Sons of God durst not attempt, have assisted and given advice how the Mechanism of the natural and greater World should have been more regular and exact. *Judge then between the Almighty and his vineyard, what he could have done more for it, that he has not done in it; yet when he looked it should bring forth grapes, it brought forth wild grapes.*

But *Secondly* and more particularly; Not to insist on, that mankind draw evil upon themselves, by neglecting the design and motives which the laws of Heaven declare and press on them; the abuse of liberty first was, and still is the cause of sin, evil, and punishment. And vice and debauchery as well as vertue are in the essential differences of things, and naturally tend to render men miserable.

Fear proceeds from guilt, and from thence an apprehension of punishment: thus when the vile offering of *Cain* procured a curse instead of a blessing, and he was wroth with God for giving the preference to his younger brother, not having respect to his offering, and casting a publick disgrace on him, *The Lord said unto him, why art thou wroth, and*

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*why is thy Countenance fallen, If thou doest well, or ill, tis from thy self, sin lyeth at the door,** and 'twas in thy power to admit or to exclude, to have brought an acceptable offering, as well as of that which was an abomination: *ὅκ' εἰν ὁρθῶς προσενέγκης, ὁρθῶς δὲ μὴ διέλῃς, ἡμαρτες; recte autem non divides,* is the *Septuagint Translation*: and agreeable to this were the *ὁδὸς πρὸς τὸν θύρας* of *Cebes*, the *Ἀμαρτία πρὸς θυρῶν* of *Antoninus*, and the notions of the Heathen Moralists. If then the Almighty created man to be immortal, and he has this glorious liberty; if the strict Justice of God obliges him to set a visible mark on the transgressor, and such a mark by which all shall know the crime and fear to commit the like; if the earth was first stain'd by murder before it receiv'd the curse of God: if through foolish devices, the worshiping serpents void of reason, and vile beasts, a multitude of unreasonable beasts are sent for vengeance; if the rivers of *Egypt* are turn'd into blood for shedding that of the infants; if the waters which stood on an heap were closed on the persecutors, who thought the *Israelites* might there have met their fate; and if those little fires and lusts of *Sodom* and *Gomorrhah* were put out and extinguish'd by a greater from the Almighty out of Heaven; if those who did not like to retain God in their knowledge were given over to a

* See A. Bp *Bramhall's* Vind. of true Liberty, against *Hobbs*, Works Fol. p. 664. Arg. the 3d.

reprobate

reprobate mind, void of judgment; if pride, the abuse of power, and becoming as the most High, in the greatest created Beings, has been smote with leprosy, eaten up of worms, cast down under chains and darkness to bottomless perdition; if a Nation or people through avarice, bribery, debauchery, and a *general Infatuation*, sinneth against the Almighty by trespassing grievously, and thereby becomes poor, contemptible, is made a sign and a proverb, and receives a blow almost as fatal as that design'd on *This day*; if the directing a man's Course of studies by fancy and not by judgment, is attended with ignorance, formality, and at last becomes the subject of ridicule; if lastly, a man's wickedness comes on his own head, and he that persueth evil persueth it to his own death; if men are polluted in their own gifts, and *wherewithal a man sinneth, by the same also is he punish'd*; *Wherefore doth a living man complain, a man for his sin?* Righteous are thy judgements; wise, just, and holy are thy ways thou King of Saints! In thy wrath thou thinkest on mercy, thou sparest when men deserve punishment, for they are thine thou lover of Souls!

And this mild behaviour, this divine love, this darling attribute, Mercy, when the Almighty visits for sin, is *Another reason* why those who suffer should not complain.

Let the chastisement be ordinary or extraordinary, and tho' for the present 'tis not
joyous

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joyous but grievous, yet if it works peace to those who are exercised thereby, thanks are due to Heaven for it. The Almighty deals with such as with sons, brings them to a tryal of their ways, a search of their former life and actions, and a thorough reformation. When such judgments are in the earth the transgressors will renew their vows and sacramental Obligations; the power of the Almighty will then be acknowledged; his justice adored; their confession and repentance will be sincere; they will humble themselves under the correction, and learn righteousness. Thro' the obscure air which incompasses their trouble and distress, they will better discern their Maker, than in the light of worldly glory; and by this severe treatment plainly perceive that the stream of blessings or afflictions flows in upon mankind, or is revers'd and turn'd another way, according as they seek the kingdom of heaven, or depart from the living God. The end of punishments is just and good, and the use made of them should be such. Men are troubled thus, that they may not be really distress'd; perplex'd, that they may not at last despair; persecuted, that they may not be forsaken; and cast down to prevent destruction; made sorrowful and stript of all things, that they may, like holy *Job*, be blessed in their latter end, and be strengthen'd with all might, unto all patience and long suffering with joyfulness. If they are bound
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in fetters and holden in cords of affliction, then the Almighty sheweth them their work and their transgressions, he openeth their ear to discipline, and commandeth that they return from iniquity.

In short then, if vent is given and any complaints are shown, let it be for that which is chiefly to be lamented, principally to be regain'd, the loss of innocence, and the favour of heaven. When the pressing guilt lies heavy on the mind and soul, and affliction in its various shapes incompasses the offender, let not fortune or ill stars be cursed, as if chance ruled the world; but let the blame rest where it ought, on the ignorance, the folly, the mismanagement of the sinner. Let not the inveterate malice of this man be accus'd, or that esteem'd an implacable adversary; but on the contrary, let the offender act humbly with his God, that the fury of the one may be restrain'd, and the other made to be at peace with him. Let him change his vain imaginations, put on an holy resolution with the *Prodigal*,* to arise and go to his father, who is ever ready to receive him with the greatest compassion, transport, and joy; who will command the fatted calf to be kill'd, the best robes and ring to be put on, the musick and feasting to be prepar'd, the sober, angry brother with the most indearing expressions shall be pacify'd, and rejoicing made over the repenting offender.

* Vide D. Chrysost. in hanc Parab.

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In fine, let him cleanse his hands, purify his heart, let him resolve on amendment, *Let him search and try his ways, and turn again unto the Lord.* This was the *Second* thing I proposed to consider,

II. The advice of the Prophet, By a religious search and trial of our ways to break off from sin by a reformation and amendment, as more acceptable to God, more becoming man, than complaints.

Without a due reflection upon, and knowledge of their past life and actions, men cannot abhor them in that manner their proper rule, the Scripture, requires; they cannot correct those customs and habits, which they have contracted, of doing evil; they cannot establish a peace between their conscience and their God. To which end 'tis, and to arrive at which happy state, that mankind are injoin'd to make this trial. The righteousness of God cannot give way, and men must perform the conditions on their part, if they expect the evils, the causes of their complaints should be remov'd. Or should that impossibility be supposed, that the justice of God would admit it, yet the nature of things cannot so be changed, as that those who have not cleans'd their hands, who are double minded, who have not followed peace and holiness, who are not pure in heart, who cannot cease from sin, should see God, or behold that glory *καλίστην καὶ ἀπερίσπυν φῶς*, as a learned Father * calls it,

* *Clem. Alex.*

with

with which he is array'd, as with a garment. As vice carries punishment with it, so vertue too and religion is its own reward. Death is the punishment of sin, sin is the death of the soul; and our redemption from it by a God incarnate, must be begun by a principle of new life; by a conformity to the resurrection of Christ, by being dead to sin and alive to God, that the spirit may be life because of righteousness.

This whole life was design'd as a state of Trial and probation, and the right conduct of it can alone give freedom from disquiet, pain, and complaint, and a joyful prospect beyond the grave. All other pursuits foreign to this religious government, afford not any solid satisfaction: the lusts of the flesh, the lust of the eye, and the pride of life, end in vanity; and in the judgment of him, who withheld not himself from any good, who knew madness as well as wisdom, and who at last sat down seriously and cast up the whole account, not deducting study and knowledge, are only increase of sorrow and vexation of spirit. The Soul has no other center or place of rest, but the supreme Spirit to which 'tis a kin; and if guilty and separated, like the Dove when gone off from the Ark finds ease only by a return. There's a fortress against all distress, which prevents all complaints. The relyance is on the Almighty, the superior powers and faculties govern, all otherwise unruly passions

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are hush'd and laid asleep, and the law of God is so fix'd in the heart, that there's no offence with the tongue, and the footsteps slip not. The heart and affections which are the fountain, are clean, pure, and holy, and the outward actions as the streams must be such, honest, just, and upright. By a close communion with the Almighty the punishment of sin is remov'd, and the temporal advantages of Religion, as well as spiritual Blessings, conferr'd in it's room. In the Lord is such a man's trust all the day long, and at night he closes his eyes with this assurance, that he shall rise again, for the Lord sustains him; that he shall open his eyes again with the light, or else awake in an eternal day.

Let us reflect briefly on the qualifications this Trial of our ways ought to be accompanied with, to render it acceptable to the Almighty.

1st, It ought to be with Sincerity.

2^{dly}, It should be accompanied with Faith.

3^{dly}, It ought to be an early Search or Trial.

The *First* of these is necessary in order to be justified before God, and to our acceptance; and however some persons may have affirm'd the contrary thro' heat, zeal, interest, an imperfect understanding, and a religious wantonness; and talked of being *sincerely wicked*, of *sincerity in Infidelity*, of *Mathematical* * *Equations upon sincerity*, and the

* See what *Dean Hare* calls Script. vindicated from the misinterp. of the Bp of Bangor. Printed Lond. 1721.

like;

like; yet every one will find, that his title to God's favour, cannot depend upon his actual being or continuing in any particular method, but upon his real sincerity in the conduct of his Conscience, and of his own actions under it: ever using all proper methods to be rightly inform'd, ever acting according to the best of his judgment.

This those great *Lights*, who first threw off idolatrous worship, and that insupportable burden of errors and trumpery of a corrupt Church, made the *Corner Stone* of their Building, and of the Reformation: and tho' 'twas not then, as of late, drawn out into a *distinct Controversy*, yet it run thro' and was maintain'd in all they wrote, or has been written by their learned Successors. This was what was then available to render the body, the Church, pure and reform'd; and this too is what must render the particular Members of it, by a religious Search, conformable to the will and likeness of their Maker.

The heady and high minded will ever be wise above what is written, different notions of the Metaphysical nature of Christ, and the holy Spirit, may and will be fram'd, and the words *Heretick*, *Schismatick*, and *Orthodox* thrown from one to another, and claim'd 'till our Saviour's second Coming; but if there's this Qualification, the person then moves upon firm ground in his Christian Course, and the favour of God, who search-

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eth the heart, will ever follow it. Let a man lay before him that infallible rule of action, and judge of all controversy, the Scripture, and submit to it. Whatever else men believe (says the unanswerable * Mr *Chillingworth*) besides it, and the plain irrefragable, indubitable consequences of it, well may they hold it as a matter of opinion, but not as matter of Faith and Religion: neither can they with coherence to their own grounds, believe it themselves, nor require the belief of it from others, without most high and schismatical presumption. For after a long Trial, and impartial Search of the true way to Happiness, I cannot (says that learned Person) find any rest but upon *This Rock* only. There are *Councils* against *Councils*, some *Fathers* against *others*, the same *Fathers* against *themselves*, a *Consent of Fathers* of one age against a *Consent of Fathers* of another age, the *Church of one age* against the *Church of another age*: no *Tradition* but the Scripture can derive it self from the *Fountain*, but may be plainly proved, either to have been brought in, in such an age after Christ, or that in such an age it was not in. The Scripture is the † sufficient certainty, for a considering man to build upon; believe that, endeavour to find the true sense of it, live according to it;

* See the passage at large, in *his Safe Way*. † See Artic. 6th with Bp *Burnet's* learned Exp. what an inspired book is: what Scripture: the Canon and Catalogue of books universally receiv'd as such, through every Century, 'till fixed.

no demonstration can be stronger than this, God hath said it, therefore 'tis true. 'Tis the only means to suppress Heresy; for 'tis the presumptuous imposing of the senses of men upon the words of God, and laying them upon men under equal penalty of Death and Damnation: the Deifying our own interpretations; that is, and hath been, the fountain of all the Schisms in the Church, which makes them immortal, what tears into pieces the members of Christ, *ridente Turcâ, nec dolente Judæo*. Take away this persecuting, burning, cursing, and damning of men, for not submitting to the words of men as the words of God: let those leave claiming Infallibility who have no title to it: in a word, take away Tyranny, and as the rivers when they have free passage run all into the Ocean, so it may be hoped *Christendom* will be reduced to Truth and Unity.

2dly, This search, this trial, this returning into the right way, should be accompanied with Faith.

Without a right and steady Faith, there never will be a right Practice, or an endeavour to procure the favour of Him who has satisfied for sin, and who mediates between God and man: *For he that cometh to the Almighty must believe that he is, and that he is a rewarder of those who diligently seek him: and to do the will of God, is to believe on Him whom he hath sent.* 'Tis the victory which overcometh the world; 'tis what removes all the mountains

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mountains and difficulties which men meet with in religion: and for want of it, as the Son of God could not do many mighty works, so the son of man will never make any considerable progress in his Duty.

Where there is not a defect as to this Grace, the glories of another world will be ever in view: the only means under Heaven given whereby we must be saved, and without which 'tis impossible to please our Maker, will be laid hold on; and all the pains and labours which can be undergone in this life will be accounted as nothing, when compar'd with what shall be reveal'd. 'Twas by *This* the noble Army of Martyrs, mention'd by the Apostle, stop'd the mouths of Lyons, quench'd the violence of fire, wax'd strong, and wrought righteousness: and by *This* too 'twas, that the Apostle himself, tho' caught up into heaven, was thoroughly converted, turn'd to the Lord, with all his might, and went straight and upright in all the parts of his duty. We have the same Light shining around us from heaven which he had, and tho' it may not strike and affect us in the same manner as it did him, yet 'tis sufficient to raise us to newness of life.

That every Sceptick should have one sent to him from the dead with a testimony, and that a continued series of miracles should be wrought by a resurrection from the dead to convince us of the truth of our own, is not necessary. Faith is the Evidence of
things

things not seen, an invifible fpring able to move the whole Moral world. A holy zeal and refolution will follow it, and no vain imagination of being wifer than all before us, no pretences to Reason, Free-thinking, Independency, with a little, low, prophane wit, ridicule and blafphemy, will be able to fhake, indanger or remove it. If we believe God hath fent his Son, who is not as thofe *which by nature are no Gods*, as a confequence of this, neither tribulation or diftreffs, life or death, things prefent or to come, will be able to feparate us, and prevent a trial of our way; or make men act as if they were born at all adventure, and fhould be hereafter, as tho' they had never been.

Laftly, It ought to be an early Search and Trial, and not put off to the laft fcene of life.

Without Repentance the end of Chrift's coming into the world is made void, and his doctrine and fufferings of none effect. Revelation has made it a term of acceptance, and natural religion and reason join in it, and declare the fame: *To day if ye will hear his voice harden not your hearts: now is the accepted time, now is the day of falvation: make no delay to turn unto the Lord, and put not off from day to day, fay not I have finn'd, and what harm hath happen'd: they that feek me early fhall find me*, is a voice which comes to us from Heaven. And obfervation and experience inform us, that no man knows what

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a day may bring forth. He who purposes to set about living aright to morrow, lays the same scheme as the fool upon eternal record, who resolved to pull down his Barnes, and build greater, and there to bestow his goods: which was staking eternity, and the greatest weakness, he having no security of a natural life. For time and life like lightning burst into being and perish at once. The present is the only time we can call our own, what we possess, and wherein to compleat this important work. There's no positive promise but to holiness, that was the design of the *first Advent* of the Son of God; and at his *second*, he will render to every one according to *his Works*: And for this Christian Sacrifice, he expects we should bring the *First Fruits*, not the dregs of life: *If ye offer the blind for sacrifice, is it not evil? and if ye offer the lame and sick, is it not evil? Offer it now unto thy Governour, will he be pleased with thee, or accept thy person, saith the Lord of Hosts?*

But granting a short space in the evening of life, yet faint Resolutions and sorrow which are weak, and low, and dying as the man himself, will not meet with pardon. Diseases then are doing execution; pain and anguish make the duty impossible; the faculties of the mind as well as body are out of order and disabled; and to nauseate and be sick at looking back on a surfeit of sin and debauchery, cannot be call'd a death to sin, a saving repentance. A multiplicity of
evil

evil acts have produced habits which are a second nature, the divine Grace has been resisted, the Spirit griev'd, the mind seared, and the Æthiopian may as soon change his skin, and the leopard his spots, as he act well. His guilt like a dead weight depresses him, that he cannot turn again, neither takes he hold of the paths of life. *He alone that beareth forth good seed shall at last return with joy, and reap what he has sown.*

The foundation whereon the delay of this duty of Trial and turning to the Lord is raised, is laid only on sand: for though the goodness of God be infinite, what has man to do with uncovenanted mercy,* and going to heaven his own way? He hath shown us what is good, the way, the truth, and the life, and not to walk in it, not to love it, not to be guided by it, not to believe in it, and yet expect to find rest to our souls, is not Hope but Presumption.

To urge the example of the Malefactor executed on the Cross, is to suppose impossibilities, and what can never be the condition of another person. For the confession of his Faith which indear'd him to his suffering dying God and Saviour, was made publickly, when all the Disciples had forsaken him and were fled; when denied, betrayed, hated, despised, mock'd, and reviled by all around him; when cover'd with con-

* See Artic. XVIII. of the *Ch. of Engl.*

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fusion; and when the Divinity too was in some measure withdrawn. This might well atone for the single act against the then Government, for which he suffer'd, and in other respects 'tis thought by many, he was able to plead not guilty.

Those who enter'd upon business at the eleventh hour, could give for excuse for their idleness that they were not 'till then hir'd: their fellow labourers, we find, were surpris'd as well as displeas'd with the equality of the reward. 'Twas certainly a free gift, more of grace than debt: and what more display'd the generosity and good nature, than the justice of the Lord of the vineyard.

Since then to return to the Almighty, is what cannot be done alike at any time, and delays render it more difficult, dangerous, and at last impossible, 'tis of the greatest concern not to make this holy Resolution and repentance a winter voyage, but to attend to the instruction of One, who was wiser than all before him, or that shall come after. *Trust in the Lord with all thine heart, and honour him with the first of thine increase: Remember thy Creator in the days of youth, before the keepers of the house tremble, and the strong men bow themselves, before desire shall cease, and the sun, the light, the moon and the stars be darken'd, while the evil days come not, before the day of life declines, and the shadows of the evening are stretched out.*

Thus

the University of Oxford. 27

Thus to be imploy'd is the way to improve our time and studies to the wisest purposes: in the language of infinite Wisdom, *'tis to have our loins girt, our lamps burning, and our selves as men who wait for their Lord.* Thus to be imploy'd is our duty, our interest, and our glory: the performance of it is of absolute necessity, as subservient to call down blessings, to make the Almighty jealous for the land, and to pity his People; to make him send prosperity like light after darkness, as the morning after a night of adversity; and to shine upon our Tabernacles as in the beginning. In short, thus to be imploy'd, is a means to avoid all the disquiets of this momentary life, and to enjoy a continuance of all those blessings. And we may securely expect, that the same Almighty arm, which *at This time wrought such a glorious and immortal Deliverance* of our Church and Nation, from Popery, slavery, and a dispensing, absolute, illegal, and arbitrary Power, will show himself, from one generation to another, *Our strength, our stony rock, our Saviour, our God, and our might, our buckler, the horn also of our Salvation, and our refuge.*

The Grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, the love of God, and the fellowship of the Holy Ghost, be with us all evermore.

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